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AMERICAN SPACES

Idea Book

Message from the
Under Secretary

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Tara D. Sonenshine

*Under Secretary for Public
Diplomacy and Public Affairs*

In a rapidly changing world, powered by social media and instant information, the United States must continue to be part of the world's vibrant conversations. At a time when so many of our embassies are forced by necessity to protect our diplomats, it's critical that we can go outside our compounds to engage in what Edward R. Murrow called "the last three feet—one person talking to another."

I have prioritized American Spaces as one of the most effective and vibrant forums for our public diplomacy outreach. Since the beginning of my tenure as Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs I have seen exciting learning taking place in Information Resource Centers, American Centers, Bi-national Centers, and Corners where foreign audiences come to engage with us on matters of common interest.

Just as traditional libraries are evolving into dynamic community spaces, our American Spaces must be dynamic as well. Over the course of the last year many people have come together, from all over the world, to work on this idea of creating Model American spaces to showcase the types of dynamic learning centers we hope all our spaces will become.

Since we began this project our vision has been clear: to further develop American Spaces that engage audiences with compelling learning environments that reflect the dynamic nature of the United States and welcome spontaneous interaction, shared ideas and warm conversations. We have

made it our goal to provide what I call CARE for every Space: Content, Access, Resources, Evaluation and robust connectivity.

Working with experts from the Smithsonian, we have created an exciting partnership to realize that vision—and take it to the next level: advancing the role of American Spaces as symbols of meaningful relationships and commitments between the U.S. and host communities.

Through this Idea Book we will provide Posts the means to improve and standardize the quality of American Spaces and their core programs. Our aim is to provide the best multifunctional platform for public diplomacy programs to promote open dialogue, counteract negative preconceptions and build bridges of understanding. Bringing our partners and Smithsonian experts together we anticipated an explosion of ideas and practical solutions, and we had just that.

We hope you will use this Idea Book as a resource to invigorate your Spaces which are, now more than ever, one of our key platforms for advancing U.S. foreign policy through the lively sharing of information and ideas. Flexible spaces, welcoming environments and state-of-the art technology can help create opportunities for learning about America, through participatory experience, casual exchanges, and social media, breaking down barriers around the world.



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Message from the Under Secretary



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*Photo Credit: James DiLoreto,
Smithsonian Institution*

The Smithsonian is pleased to submit this Idea Book as the final deliverable of our American Spaces Assessment and Redesign Project. We hope it will serve as a guide for all American Spaces eager to refresh their facilities with a new look and new content for use by their visitors. The Idea Book contains design concepts, finishes and furnishings, and programming and IT/social media recommendations, supported by narratives explaining how our recommendations might be implemented in different types of American Spaces.

American Spaces, from my perspective, are terrific assets for this country and offer enormous opportunity. It is a great privilege for the Smithsonian to work with all of you on this important and vital project, particularly because our mission is the “increase and diffusion of knowledge.” We are passionate about engaging our visitors and our role in the world of cultural diplomacy.

From the initial discussions with State to the team visits to the American Spaces, from the design efforts to the planning and convening of the project workshop, this has been a wonderful and rewarding partnership all around. Collaboration and shared commitment have been central to this project: when our delegations visited the American Spaces

and peer institutions around the world and met with Embassy and American Spaces staff, partners, and visitors, all were unstinting in their generous contributions to the project. All of these stakeholders are key to the success of this endeavor, and ownership of the final recommendations will be in the hands of the American Spaces themselves.

We have benefited greatly from the support of our State Department partners throughout. Our ideas have been strengthened through communication and feedback, and we have all learned so much from you. On behalf of the entire International Museum Professional Education Program team and the broader Smithsonian Institution, we want to thank the State Department—particularly the Bureau of International Information Programs—for the opportunity to work on this project. Members from several Smithsonian Institution units have enthusiastically participated in the program, drawing expertise from the National Museum of Natural History, the National Museum of American History, the Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the National Portrait Gallery, the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES), and the Office of Facilities Engineering and Operations. We look forward to the possibilities ahead and to continuing this partnership and supporting you in any way we can.



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Message from the Program Director



Overview

The Idea Book is a broad branding and design resource for the worldwide network of American Spaces. It is the product of an extraordinary collaboration between the Department of State (DoS) and the Smithsonian Institution (SI)—the final deliverable of a project entitled the “American Spaces Assessment and Redesign Project.”

The Bureau of International Information Programs (IIP) initiated this nine-month project to increase the capacity of American Spaces to engage their audiences in sustained, meaningful interactions and activities and to build mutual understanding between Americans and international audiences.

As the initial focus of this project, IIP selected seven model spaces representing the six regions designated by the State Department, as well as the variety of types of American Spaces. DoS and SI teams visited spaces in Brasilia, Brazil; Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan; Mexico City, Mexico; Muscat, Oman; Manila, Philippines; Bucharest, Romania; and Pretoria, South Africa. The assessment and design enhancement of these seven spaces sought to reinforce the standardization of content, access and resources and their evaluation (C.A.R.E.), and to support the delivery of American Spaces Core Programs (English language and learning; EducationUSA advising; alumni pro-

grams; cultural programs; and providing information about the U.S.), while also being transferable to other American Spaces.

In helping conduct this global review of spaces, the Smithsonian has provided expertise in architecture, exhibitions, and space design, programmatic strategies (how to best use spaces for specific types of activities), and IT and mobile capabilities. From the start, the collaborative approach to the project has been as inclusive as possible. In this vein, SI and DoS convened a three-day workshop in Washington, D.C. that consisted of plenary sessions; site specific meetings with designers/architects; small group discussions focused on topics of common interest related to project objectives; opportunities to experience and see design samples, and tours of SI museums and programming spaces. The workshop allowed us to gather reactions from key stakeholders and to solicit questions and additional ideas for consideration to guide development of more targeted and realistic final recommendations. SI tested concepts for guidelines, design, branding, and programming and began to identify potential issues related to implementation, as well as discussed with attendees the resources that SI can offer IIP and the network of American Spaces. An introduction to these resources is included in this Idea Book.

We recognize that each Space is unique as to size, configuration, community, and user requirements. Therefore, we offer the Idea Book as a guide, not



Introduction

as a directive. We strongly encourage Spaces to use the Idea Book as a starting point for inviting local, user involvement, whether by soliciting visitor feedback on design concepts and programs, or identifying and using local source materials for furnishings. We appreciate the richness that host communities bring to American Spaces, and we believe that to be effective these ideas must be implemented in a way that acknowledges and embodies the local context. We hope these design ideas and concepts stimulate your creativity and help you to enhance and invigorate your space, making what is strong even stronger, and guiding improvements where needed.



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This Idea Book is the culmination of a project led by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of International Information Programs and the Smithsonian Institution.

The U.S. Department of State

The Bureau of International Information Programs (IIP) is the State Department's foreign-facing public diplomacy communications bureau. It provides and supports the places, content, and infrastructure needed for sustained conversations with foreign audiences to build America's reputation abroad.

IIP supports both physical and virtual places, including over 800 American Spaces around the world, as well as a growing social media community that numbers over 22 million followers. Content includes publications, video, and U.S. expert speakers, who engage foreign audiences both in person and through virtual programs. IIP manages the infrastructure for all embassy and consulate websites, translations of public remarks by the President and Secretary, and internal websites serving field public diplomacy officers.

The Office of American Spaces (IIP/RCA/AS) provides strategic guidance, leadership, and training for the development and sustainability of American Spaces. It is the home office for the Foreign Service Specialist corps of Information Resource Officers (IROs) who are instrumental in the establishment, management and evaluation of all types of spaces: from Information Resource Centers (IRCs), American Corners (ACs), Bi-national Center libraries (BNCs), American Centers, to a host of hybrid variations on the theme. IROs are posts' direct conduit into the broad range of PD tools and content to enhance the effective engagement of posts' American Spaces. They help posts access and utilize the broad range of public diplomacy

tools to engage key audiences. The Washington office also provides research, copyright and book translation services available to all U.S. overseas missions and in support of American Spaces programming.

The Smithsonian Institution

Founded in 1846, the Smithsonian Institution (SI) is the largest museum and research complex in the world. The Smithsonian encompasses nineteen museums, nine research centers, and the national zoo and addresses the broadest range of content—art, history, science, and culture. We welcome more than 30 million visitors onsite and more than 180 million unique visitors to our websites each year. Home to a collection of more than 137 million objects, more than 6,000 staff and another 6,000 volunteers, we work across nearly every discipline, create exhibitions and programs, and conduct research, expeditions and studies worldwide. Consistent with our mission—"the increase and diffusion of knowledge"—we work in partnership with scholars, institutions, and governmental and private agencies, to contribute to the advancement of cultural and scientific knowledge and public understanding. Fundamental to our work is the desire to excite the learning in everyone. We recognize that our success in achieving our mission depends upon our ability to work with—and learn from—peer institutions and organizations worldwide with similar missions. As a critical element of our partnerships, we work closely with colleagues around the world to help strengthen the capacity of the cultural and scientific research sectors.



Who We Are

We put forward here design and programmatic ideas to help enliven the full range of Spaces, from wholly managed American Centers to co-managed American Corners and Bi-national Centers, to Information Resource Centers and Science Corners.

Through consultation with American Spaces staff and partners, Embassy staff, IIP staff, and numerous designers from SI and beyond, we have developed three design concepts that may serve as schemes and sources of ideas for interior space planning and selection of design, furniture, and graphics and imagery. The concepts were developed with these goals in mind:

- To provide users of American Spaces worldwide with innovative and dynamic environments within which they can explore the diversity of American language, culture, and education and career opportunities; and
- To advance the role of American Spaces as symbols of shared relationships and commitments between the U.S. and host communities.

For each theme in the Idea Book, we provide recommendations to help you (re)design and enliven your spaces. Where necessary, we have provided the specifications and ordering information that you will need for procurement. The book contains suggestions on:

- Palette
- Carpets, textiles, and finishes
- Furniture schedule
- Finish schedule
- Images or artwork

We provide table and chair configurations, which allow you to see how spaces of different sizes might accommodate various types of activities.

Additionally, we include sections on:

- *Mobile American Spaces*—this explores options for moveable spaces to help IIP reach new and broader audiences;
- *IT/Mobile strategy*—this contains recommendations for managing a spectrum of capabilities in the areas of digital media and access;
- *Smithsonian content resources*—here we provide information about materials you can find on a broad array of subjects, as well as images from Smithsonian museums available for use within your spaces.



What You'll Find